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THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER



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WICH EMAN

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THE THINGS HE
WROTE TO HER

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THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

BY
RICHARD WIGHTMAN
AUTHOR OF "SOUL-SPUR"



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Oft do I dream this strange and penetrat-
ing dream;
An unknown woman, whom I love, who
loves me well,
Who does not every time quite change, nor
yet quite dwell
The same,—and loves me well, and knows
me as I am.
. and she alone knows to dispel
My grief, cooling my brow with her tears'
gentle stream.

—Paul Verlaine.

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FIRST WORD

On a certain planet, once upon a time, dwelt a man and a woman. Both were alive; both were human. One day, in the strange, wide path of Chance, they came face to face and looked into each other's eyes. After that, for a long time, they were seldom in the same neighborhood, and, besides, the hard hands of Conventionality and what is called Law built high fences between them, frequently rendering necessary some means of communication other than speech. What the man wrote to the woman is in this book. What the woman wrote to the man is not in this book. Not all things that happen are set down. It is better so.

THE THINGS
HE WROTE TO HER

THE FIRST MORNING AFTER THE FIRST EVENING

8

—————:

Was it only last night?

Today is the 8th, yesterday was the 7th. Yes, it *must* have been last night, but it seems such a long time back. Surely hours are capacious things—they hold so much!

I did not know that I was going to meet you, and you caught me quite unarmed. There are so many women—they swarm—and one really ought to be ever alert and on the defensive, but last night when you stood in the path and challenged, I was scarcely

ready. My shield appeared to be mislaid, and my scabbard empty, and my sense of distance most unreliable. I will not say that you took any unfair advantage, nor even admit that you pinked me, but when I put to you the question, "What is Life?" and you got back at me quick and strong with "Life is the Soul's adventure and opportunity," I knew that, as women go, you were, well—distinctive.

For the first half-hour I thought you cold, blasé, opinionated. Later in the evening I began to think that estimate decidedly unjust; and this morning my memory holds you as warm, expectant and receptive.

I hardly know why I am writing this, or anything. Perhaps it is be-

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cause I did not sleep, in which event my hand sometimes shakes and traces foolish, irregular things.

Woman as an institution is very well indeed, but women in particular I do not like—much. Their ways upset me and most of them are perfumed. But I have always held that somewhere on this green earth there was a woman who—who was *a real woman*. I have never searched for her and never will, but in my pocket diary, opposite the 7th, I have put, in pencil, a little cross. I do not know just what it means—perhaps nothing. It is merely a little cross.

A WEEK OR SO AFTER THAT

8

—————:

This letter is designed to contain a fact and a warning. The fact is bluntly put and the warning as solemn as I can make it, and were your woof of the common feminine sort I should expect you to gather your skirts and pass on, giving to your world a well-adjectived report of the man who dared.

The fact is this—I desire to investigate you; and the warning this—if you permit me to do so I shall hold you at your true worth, not a farthing more, and by what I find out shall

you stand or fall, in my own peculiar esteem.

I think I can count on you to understand that this design of mine is neither fell nor brutal—I merely wish to know you as you are, your thoughts, hopes, fears, tastes, recreations,—the things you love, the things you hate, and what you look upon as life's supreme good.

And, to be fair, what I seek to know about you, you shall know about me, as time and opportunity permit, for the basis of friendship is Understanding, the tenure of friendship is Sincerity, the fruit of friendship is Progress, and the crown of friendship is Peace.

There seems to be no earthly rea-

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son why any man and woman should not build a little ell on life when the tools are at hand.

Will you lunch with me at the Colonia, Saturday at two?

THE MENTAL MENU

8

I wonder if the pillared maw of the Colonia was quite aware of the kind of people it swallowed that Saturday at two. I suppose we looked like the rest of those who came, ate like them, drank like them, and demeaned ourselves in a similarly proper fashion, but unless my reckoning is wrong we were singularly odd, and I think if the world were aware of what we thought and said it would pass upon us with deprecation and declare us hopelessly impossible.

9

You were not quite on time, you remember, and I sat among the oriental pillows framing an accusation—*you were primping*. But when you finally came, your innate and unforced daintiness quashed the indictment and I credited you with having merely missed your car.

Unless you do something untoward to spoil the notion, I shall always hold you in my thought as permanently trim and well-rigged—in the matter of apparel absolutely reliable and comforting—and I base this conclusion not upon any favorable personal prejudice, but deduce it from the general premise that any woman who can look as you looked on Saturday at two-ten, will look as she ought to

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look on Monday at half-past nine in the morning.

As I review the experience of that hour to which you so graciously and bravely lent yourself, I am quite ready to admit that I like you,—ready even to put it down in black and white. Surely, we meet at enough points to make friendship possible and cumulative, for the list of the things to our common liking includes books, horses, pictures, music, the drama, tolerance, life for life's sake, and the relegation of mere money to the impenetrable shades.

I think we shall get on, and prophesy that there will be flung into space a new world, banned, perhaps, by conservative astronomers, but

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quite satisfactory as a habitat for the two odd folk who sipped the Colonia brew, waived commonplaces, and traded thoughts on Principle and Destiny.

THE TREASURES OF MOROCCO

8

——— ———:

On the desk before me lies a book with uncut leaves. I got it only today and bore it to my den with the thrill of possession. Again and again I have touched it with reverent hands and taken an occasional eyeful of the beauties of its binding and typography. But just what is in the book I do not know. It is waiting for me and it is good, but the spirit of haste is not in me—with deliberate joy I delay the hour of perusal and

plan the details of the event as a bride plans her wedding, for I have learned that reading, in its best estate, is a sacrament of the mind, to be celebrated devoutly and preceded by expectancy and fasting.

The author of this book has written other books which have helped to lay the rails on which my thinking travels, and hence I am in some measure prepared for this further reach into the Great Land.

He is a man who has lived *the Life*, and consequently stands white and lone and courageous, not at the summit but near it, with uplifted eyes. When he writes, the comparatively small number of men and women who are qualified and ready put their eyes

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upon his page with held breath, and then go back to their toil as those who have seen a vision whose glories they would fain transcribe in the varied terms of daily life and duty.

Twice have I seen this man, once in the thronged street of the city and once at the window of the cottage which will one day be a shrine for those later generations who will see his work in proper perspective, hew his likeness in stone, enthrone it in the public square, and scramble to touch the pen with which he wrought.

When I saw him his brow was unreddened by the press of any crown, his hands were without jewels, and his shoes of the common leathern sort, but I knew the royal blood was in his

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veins and my spirit made fitting obeisance.

They say that Southey, old and feeble and blind, went into his library on his last earth-night, ran his trembling fingers over the well-worn bindings of his favorite books, bade them one by one an affectionate good-by, and then fell asleep.

Oh, my friend, ought we not to quicken our appreciation of those who have labored to communicate themselves to us through printed things, thereby breathing upon us the endless benedicite of their philosophy and song?

I think that among *our deprivations* there is none quite akin to this—we are so seldom permitted to read

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together, and then talk it out in the little hours when the town is still, and all that savors of greed and gain is shamed into the shadows by the smile of the quiet stars.

And the leaves of the book are still uncut!

If I had the power to call you now, and you heard and came, I think this could just about be reckoned the sacramental hour.

*TAKING THE WRAPPINGS
FROM THE HEART*

8

—————:

I am wondering if the baring of a human heart to your vision could possibly bring you aught of good this day, particularly if that heart were mine. Somehow I think it might.

This may be only the conceit of a presumptuous mortal, but if it be true that we feed upon our friends and take our life-sap from kindred souls, perhaps the conceit may be pardoned and the presumption softened into sheer good-will.

And you, of all women, have the

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right to know, for since the Fates, all unbidden, led our feet to the starlit river and your eyes looked into mine *that way*, what I am is not my own property and secret. If you were less than you are, less good, less noble, less my kind, I could run and hide, and after a time forget, but your very nature binds me to you, keeps me in your world. Therefore it is right for me to let you see me as I see myself, come what may, and if you are neither shocked, surprised nor ashamed, I shall be glad.

You asked me once, you remember, why I was reasonably happy, and I put you off with a makeshift—told you it was because I could not afford to be otherwise, for the causes of

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happiness, I think, may not be glibly given. In answering your query now, I bare my heart to you and let you see what time and tears, and a few other things, have put into my philosophy.

If I am happy it is because of what I believe and endeavor to express in what I do. These things I hold: the goodness and cumulation of life; the benevolence of the universe manifested in the immutability of natural law; the defensive power of silence and non-resistance; the glory of labor; the sanctity of the body; the debt of man to woman; the ministry of chivalry; and the virtue and absolute legality of all love.

This sort of thinking gilds the

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hours for me and helps me to feel at sunset that the day, and what happened in it, was, perhaps, not quite in vain.

If these notions of mine seem good to you, reach across the miles and touch my forehead with your hand. It will be to me the further seal of mental comradeship—the earnest of larger joys and a lift to higher levels with room for at least two.

THE HINDERING MILES

8

———:

The postman was kind today. He brought me your letter and the rest of the things you sent, all of which interest me greatly. I am *so glad* you are succeeding, but if you were *not* I think I could demonstrate my thought toward you even more fully. The summit is always easy. *With me* the shadowed valley's the thing. It tests the fiber of what is within. Oh, that I might speak all the heart-things that seek egress! But I am in leash. Strange, is n't it, that I plead with you to express

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yourself—to let yourself go—and argue hotly that bondage is a sin, and then stand myself, tied and dumb, in the presence of your wondrousness! But this silence is only one of the passing impositions of distance, and when you are near again, so near that I can hear the beating of your heart, it seems as if our little world must needs be vocal with the words which are now in prison. What number of months did you mention in your last letter? Was it eight? Ah me! But there is much for us each to do, and life and hope and courage are renewed with each day's sun.

THE SPIRIT OF BARTER

8

—————:

A boy should respect what is given him and cherish it.

This is the theory fine and prim, but the world is full of boys whose real treasures are in other door-yards. Once, when I was little and had a stone-bruise on my foot, my father gave me (oh, wondrous consolation!) a steel magnet. The handle-part was painted red and there was a bar across the poles to complete the circuit and hold the power in. It was a costly affair, very scientific and, in the judgment of the aged, just the thing to fill

a lad's eye, stimulate his hunger for a knowledge of physics, and make him forget stone-bruises and kindred woes. But, *having* the magnet, I inventoried it low, and went into the village to seek its riddance and the possession of some substitutional joy whose handle was *not* red, whose make-up and mission were *unscientific* and relatively sodden.

And the village promptly furnished the opportunity in the person of a brown urchin, who produced from pockets of measureless depths a whip-lash, and a sky-hued butterfly of a species new to me.

On these I set covetous eye and bartered my magnet for them with eager haste. The wings of the but-

terfly were rubbed and broken, and in due season I received the marks of the whiplash upon my small body, but my nature had asserted itself, had longed, reached out and taken, had come into its own, and *that*, after all, and that *only*, IS LIFE.

When I was a boy no more and had begun to sense the length and difficulty of the Way; when my friends with gentle glee pointed chaffing fingers at the hints of silver on my temples; when my heart was hard hit with the missiles of Disappointment and Delay, and Fate with paternal tenderness and well-meant generosity had heaped my hands with compensatory things, designed to comfort and assuage, the old spirit of discontent

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and hunger for the Unpossessed surged through me like a flood, and again I went into the village—and *you* were there!

If the world knew what happened in the village, it would doubtless argue, from its viewpoint, the difference between what I gave and what I got, allege that the wings of the butterfly were rubbed and broken, and foretell the falling of the lash, but *with me* the soul's demand is sacred; a trade's a trade; only our own can call us; life is good; and the heights beckon. Let us climb them, you and I, strong with the strength of two, and vibrant with the thrill of Complement and Content.

THE UNDERSTANDING

8

—————:

This has been a busy day for me—press of detail, clash of interests, honest difference between the minds who run our commercial concern. At noon I knew I would be tired tonight—overtired—and resolved not to write to you, fearing a laggard pen and thoughts trivial and unworthy.

But the Mood has its hands at my throat—there is something I want to say, and I ask for grace to say it well, for it relates to the fiber which enters into our structure, and it is agreed between us that we are to build strong

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—a house that will not topple in the wind.

When you came into my life your girlhood lay behind; you were a woman, fair and full and round, with a woman's heart, and a woman's mind, and a woman's point of view. Your lips, also, were the lips of a woman, and likewise your feelings and desires. There were numerous people in your world, you had seen different lands, you knew many things, and had been broadened and vitalized by experience. In other words, you *had lived* and longed to live more, and it was that, I think, which caught and held me.

You will remember that I have never asked you to tell me the story

of those former days, never put a pencil in your hand and tried to get you to trace a map of your mental and affectional journeyings. This lack of curiosity on my part is due to my belief in a certain principle which I hold tenaciously and declare almost with fierceness,—a woman is what *she is*, and must be considered apart from her environment and detached from all the former things in her life. For every woman, in order that she may be *a woman*, is dowered with sex, and sex is forever creating conditions which can never be satisfactorily explained before any minor judgment seat.

What I know of your life is what you have been pleased to tell me.

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

You are the product of your yesterdays, and later will be the further product of your tomorrows. You hold your place in my life, not because of what you have been, but because of what you are, and what you may become. You need relate to me nothing. I desire neither apology nor explanation. I take you by and large, and wager my all upon the quality of your womanhood, present and yet to be.

As for myself, this: there are things in every man's life which cannot be told, things which are made possible by the dross that was put into his making without his knowledge or consent, things whose telling would add not one whit to the happiness of

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his kind or the general good of the universe. And I am a man, with all that implies, and am glad of it, through and through. My past is like the common run, in that it is not all that it should have been, but it is *my* past, the best one I could make with the tools I had to work with, and I shall neither repudiate it nor wear myself thin regretting its imperfections. Whatever I know, it taught me, and I count my investment in its tuition the best I have ever made. It is better to aspire than to repine, and to be worthy of *you*, to have a place by your side in the lilt and onwardness of life, will be about the cleanest desire my heart can entertain.

And (I almost forgot) what about

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those former days, yours and mine?
I guess it would be well to seal the
early volumes of our personal story
and concern ourselves chiefly with the
rest of the set.

Shall we strike hands and call it a
bargain?

*THE EARTH, THE HORSE,
AND THE WOMAN*

8

———:———

This was a morning among mornings—bright, cool and glorious. I am indebted to the sun for calling me so early, and to the cold water which fell upon my head and body, putting a finishing touch to my awakening, and making me ready for food and the subsequent out-of-doors. Where do you think I went and what do you think I did?

Astride a thoroughbred of old Virginia, easy and fleet, with neck re-

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sponsive to the slightest rein-touch, her fine-fibered undulant frame attuned to my wish and will, I rocked through the land serenaded by locusts and companioned by thoughts of you. Down green-roofed aisles of beech and poplar, through sanded vales threaded by satin streams, up little banks where fragrant grasses grow, 'round ponds with sloping shores and shallow inlets, through squirreled copses, past heroned marshes, I rode and rode, occasionally letting go an ejaculatory prayer of thankfulness. The world seemed literally brimming with good, and my heart sent back Despondency's card and instructed them to tell him I was not at home.

Surely, this have I found, that there

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is something in the back of a horse and one's memory of a woman that takes the sting out of life and makes one plan for more canters and more memories,—that is if the horse be yours—your very own—and the woman yours, too,—both fitted to you by the kindly, skilful Fates, purveyors of the best, who sit in the far secluded corners of the mart where the soul does its buying.

Oh, really, my lady, you need not be troubled! I am not straining things to lift the horse to your plane in the scheme of the universe. I am merely saying that joy is joy; intelligence is intelligence; comradeship is comradeship; fidelity is fidelity; and love is love, no matter with what man-

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ner of silk their enfolding bodies may be adorned.

And for all these things which I have found in you and elsewhere—chiefly in you—I thank the good God, and reach for more, insatiate.

I believe that tomorrow will be another day. May the gold of its morning be your riches, and the glow of its evening your benediction!

THE PEDESTAL

8

———:

You once said that the pedestal upon which I have placed you is too high—not for the looks of the thing but for the truth of it, and that your fall, if a fall happened, would be a far one and result in a fearful shattering.

I would have you know, my madame of modesty, that this pedestal is not an accident; it was not thrown up by some compelling chance. I built it myself and its form and height were determined upon with careful deliberation. You are high in my thought, worthy of the light on all

sides, and a dark, low niche under the eaves, while doubtless conservative and safe, would not comport with my conception of your texture and dignity and character. The kind of thought which I hold toward you is never content with anything less than the utter enthronement of its objective, and the thought itself is the earnest of the ultimate regality of the one who, perhaps in advance of perfect realization, is deemed noble and strong.

Sometimes love is a noun and sometimes it is a verb, but always it is a lever to lift the loved and make it intrinsically fit to dwell in the environment of altitude and light. And love, the lever, works without being indi-

vidually conscious of its task. It works easily and well, and because it is love it vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, and finds its joy, not in its own being and essence, but in seeing its object achieve the high place and hold it by sheer right of beauty and power.

You doubtless have your flaws—such things are still incident to Nature and humanity; there was never yet a perfect rose nor a perfect woman—but I shall abate my thought of you not one whit because of them. No matter what you may think you have of mental bias, or misdirected desire, or instinct untrained, or whim, caprice or unreason, I have set my heart upon you, your being and be-

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coming. The pedestal stands as I made it, full height, white from base to cornice, and all the laws of creative and upholding love must be annulled before any crash can rend the sweet silence of my Temple of Dreams.

So there now! Be assured, and remember that the best way to get rid of dizziness is to *accept the elevation* and regard the good universe as including the heights as well as the depths.

THE FEAST AND THE FIRE

8

———:

There was a dinner tonight, a very tangible dinner, with white lights, and pink women, and red wine, and deft servers, and food fit for Epicurus, and music—music lit with yellow rising suns and shot with laughter and tears, hope and despair.

And to this dinner I was invited, and to this dinner I did not go, electing instead to take my hour with you—to open my lodge at your knock; to break with you the unleavened bread of fellowship; to drink with you the rare old wine from the Cask of Life;

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to hear with you the music of that wondrous lute whose strings seem to lie ever docile beneath the quick, white fingers of our kindly Destiny—strains that would slay those who have come by lower paths into lesser experiences.

And now that we are together and alone—though between our bodies a continent lies and the universal stars look mercilessly down—let the feast begin, and the wine flow, and the lute release its melody!

.

Well, we have eaten, and drunk, and harkened, and all was good. Is it not so?

And now I will shade the light and we will be quiet awhile. Let us look

together at what is happening in the grate, and talk little. Souls on the same plane may be satisfied with mere nearness—proximity is enough. Words, after all, are but vehicles for ideas to ride in, and when once an understanding is reached, speech may be mostly put aside and communication merged into communion. This is the soul's highest revel and the aftermath is a clearer vision, an ardor for life, and an appreciation of the little tasks which fill the average day and give heart, hand and brain their legitimate employ.

Is not the silence truly sweet and golden? Is aught missing?

Lie close and—see, the log has broken in twain, the flame's swift play

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

has lessened for sheer lack of something to feed upon, the embers are paling, and the gray ashes are more and more! I fain would hold you through the coming chill—we might be warm together—but the hour is up. You were most kind to come. I am armored for the morrow. It was good that I did not go to the dinner.

PHOTOGRAPHS

8

———:

Naples—you must be there for from thence the packet came, its rugged wrapping tied bafflingly with stout hemp. Twine is cheaper than time and it is my habit to cut it and fling the bits to the four winds, but alas, you are a spoiler of prudent habits. I fumbled at the knots nervelessly and lashed myself into an ecstasy of anticipation, for were not *you* within and had I not spent hours, literally hours, wondering where you had put that new six pounds which

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

you wrote you had filched from the Continent? Never were knots so hard to undo, and never before did a real, human woman make six more alluring and charmingly different bids for masculine capitulation!

When the riot within me was partially put down by a compromise-indulgence of eyes and lips, I made a sort of descriptive tabulation which runs like this:

The One with the Smile
The One with the Hair
The One with the Eyes
The Dreamy One
The Sweet One
and
The One with the Soul

Choose, did you say *choose*, with the whole outfit in my possession, and

you, the arch miser, way on the other side of the ocean? Well, if I must, I must. I guess I will take the One with the Soul, particularly as it also seems to carry with it mind and body and the daintiest gown I ever saw you in—and that 's saying a lot. Please to forget never, that because what you *are* appeals to me, I am not at all sleepy about what you have on. The highway to human enchantment, I have heard, is well-decked with the furbelow flower. So be it, and may the Lord bless the dressmakers and forgive their many sins.

No, on second thought, I won't choose—just simply *won't* unless you let me do it like the last child before the jeweler's window. There they

stand on the hot sidewalk, first on one bare foot and then on the other, tattered and penniless, Mary and Betty and John, the innocent covetousness of childhood running free among the gems lying in purple state behind the pitiless and sufficient glass.

"I choose the rubies," says Mary:
"I choose the diamonds," cries Betty:
"And I," shrieks John, with appropriate crescendo and a monopolistic sweep of his grimy hand, "I choose *everything!*"

John's choice is my choice—*everything*,—and you will just have to submit.

In a row on my dresser? No, indeed! The housemaid has profane eyes and, besides, I should not like to

think of you as the Queen of the Velox Parade. You shall have a little dark domain all to yourself, and only when I say so shall you stand revealed, and the audience will be very, very small, but thoroughly capable of what the newspapers call "tumultuous applause."

Bend down, I want to whisper something. I have rented a safety-deposit box so many inches by so many inches and at so much per quarter, and there is also a quiet little room where one can go and be alone with what one sets store by. In a certain city, it is said, a woman came twice a week to one of these places, staying a half-hour each time. She was a pale woman in a black dress.

By and by she did n't come any more, neither did she call to surrender her key, all of which was perplexing to the safety-deposit people. After waiting a suitable time and trying hard to find her, but without success, they broke into the compartment to see what bonds and valuables she had, and found—a tress of yellow hair, a little shoe worn through at the heel, and a baby's rattle!

And now I have *my* box and *my* key and *my* treasure, and when I call, the fat and uniformed warden of wealth will bow and smile and let me in and shut the door and stand outside and tap the tessellated floor with his foot and think that I am cutting coupons!

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

But I hate Naples. It is so far
away.

—————

A GRAY DAY

8

———:

This is what I call a gray day. The sun seems to be away from home, and the tintless clouds, slow and heavy, hang sullenly below the mountain-tops, veritable loafers of the sky.

It is n't raining, but wants to and probably will.

The summer is hardly what it was a fortnight ago. There is a hint of chill in the air, and here and there a young maple has gone into the browns and reds under the first touch of the frost's silver hand and stands out, a

lambent silhouette, against the background of forest green.

And, apart from the changes in expression on Nature's face, two great things have happened. Yesterday, while I was fishing, a cedar waxwing lit on my rod and executed a graceful trick in balancing—it was a pretty circus—and the day before that I drove a furlong with a butterfly perched on either rein, waving glorious wings in the sunlight! I reckon that, as events go, these outrank in importance the fall of Port Arthur. They were certainly quieter and involved no greed or blood-letting, points which, in my thinking, are decidedly in their favor.

I wish your eyes might have been

here just now to see what my eyes saw.

I am sitting very near to the edge of the hill-guarded lake. The mob on the veranda was noisy with cheap chatter and so hither I fled,—I trust with due decorum. The lake is as still and quietly joyous as a human heart which has reached the end of its quest, and a moment ago, within ten feet of where I am sitting, a brook trout leapt clear of the water, traced the image of his beauty upon my retina, and then dropped back into the clear, cold water, leaving behind a hint of the hues and emotions which lie beneath the surface of this mountain lake. It was only a little joy and a fleeting one but it was real and clean

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

and natural and worth while, and I wish we might have beheld and exclaimed together. And now it occurs to me that, in the life of the trout, that leap was a matter of some importance, an achievement whose inspiration was either hunger, pleasure or fear. Perhaps the trout darted upward for a fly on the surface of the water, perhaps his leap into another element was due to sheer joy in life and motion, or perhaps he was seeking to escape from the maw of a larger and pursuing fish.

I think I must have leaped into your sunlight actuated by one or more of these motives. Hunger in my life was a daily distress—hunger of heart and mind and soul. I craved com-

panionship, the nearness of one whose very presence could nourish and edify me. Also I was infatuated with life, eager for the thrill of new experiences, seeking the investment of sympathy and devotion in some heart-enterprise worthy and satisfying; and, again, I was chased by the fear that the love-elements of my nature would be forever hived, and atrophy for sheer lack of expression—that my life, failing to achieve its complement, would build itself without symmetry, ugly and brittle, a warning rather than an exemplar to those who might behold it.

But whatever the motive I am glad for the leap. You have not disappointed me, and even the grayness of

this day is translated into brilliance in the vision with which you have endowed me.

And because you have helped me to look upon the world with new and seeing eyes, because you lend the touch of song to the prose of small happenings and fit wings to my imagination and aspirations, I long to have you with me, literally with me, everywhere and always. Even as things are, this gray day is a good day. But I need you by me on the shore! The sandpiper tilting on the bar; the reed diamonded with mist; the echo of the woodman's halloo among the hills; the dependableness of Nature; these, with certain

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER
memories and certain hopes, comfort
me.

POSING

8

——— ———:

Hold your sides, please, and get ready.

I am being done in oil! Not boiled in it like a martyr, nor packed in it like a sardine, nor buncoed in it like a small investor, but just painted in it like a knight, a millionaire or an actor.

My, but it hurts! Posing is something woful. I used to think a dentist, with his gouges and drills and buzz-saws was the devil, but for bland and diabolical imposition of physical torture he is n't to be named with the

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

quiet and mild-mannered woman-of-the-brushes who comes at nine, paints till twelve and then goes at it again at half-past one. She gets all wrapped up in her work and seems to think that a man has calves of gold, feet of clay, torso of steel and a smile as durable as Rogers 1847.

Personally, I did n't take much stock in the portrait idea but my blessed relatives insisted that some sort of a correct impression should be conveyed to posterity, and so I gave in. I suggested a photograph, colored if necessary, but they reminded me that this is a world of fly-specks and said it ought to be something that could be "washed off" with soap and water. Posterity indeed! Think of

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

posterity standing in a row in the parlor in front of this imperishable canvas, and saying—"Look at Uncle. Was n't he a sight!"

What kind of a frame do you suggest?

EMANCIPATION

8

——— ———:

When, in the early days of our acquaintance, I reached what I thought was a proper appraisalment of your worth as a woman—your worth to me—I felt as if I must set you off by yourself as a man sets off a park for his own enjoyment, beautifies it, gloats over his title to the land, and builds fences to keep people out. I felt that your hours, your thoughts and your beauty were utterly *mine*, and sought to thrust an arbitrary and defensive hand between you and all encroachment, hating

every footstep that seemed to go your way. By the sheer right of our relation I would have you and hold you for my very own and for all time.

But I have changed; I have been taught many things; I have come to see the futility of force in the realm where human hearts play the game Nature has set for them.

Therefore, with deliberate hand I lengthen your tether, yea, loose it altogether. You are free, or, if you please, holden only by the limits which are fixed by your own will.

I want you to know other men, not a few, but many. If a man is thrown your way, and seems interesting, employ—I desire it—all necessary time and means to arrive at what he really

is. Give to him all that you have for him, and take from him all that he has for you. You are a wonderful woman and should be shared, and the world holds many men who are bright and strong, capable of appealing to you in ways that I cannot. Know them, I say, know them well, and come my way only when your heart drives you thither—only when your own gage proclaims the proportions of my nature ample to command and appease you.

Do not misunderstand me. Mine is the recklessness of justice and wisdom. If I play thus fast and loose with you, it is not because I do not want you any more, but because it is best, the only true way, for I believe

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

the soul is dowered with the right of experience and exploration, and that love cannot be placed as we will,—here or there or yonder,—but *will find its own* as surely as the dew finds the lily that lifts its frond in the glad sweet dawn.

The door of your cage, my lady, is open and held back; the sunlight is upon the hyacinths; the breeze is stirring the young leaves of the maples; and I am listening for the fluttering of wings!

AT MIDNIGHT

8

——— ———:

My heart and the clock agree that it is midnight. Three bulbs over my table indicate that *some* wires that carry light are still strung, that *some* dynamo is still vital, that *some* workmen have their aprons on as usual and are doubtless mixing their toil with banter about the last dance, or the twins that came to McCarthy's house when McCarthy was on a spree. But for me there is no light, no power, no badinage. My recollection of the good yesterday mocks me, the anticipation of tomor-

row terrifies me, and the poignant pain that came with today, grew with it, and is outlasting it, is hell.

I suppose that every man must take what comes with his nature—must pay the price that is asked for having his particular kind of a soul. Hence, if I am impelled from within to do and dare in a foe-peopled land, I must take the wounds and loss of blood which go with doing and daring; if I make a bid for Life and Light, I must expect the balance to be preserved—that Death and Darkness will also be knocked down to me.

This is the philosophy, and I love it and play it at every turn of the wheel, but, God, how dark it is to-night, and to what depths of disap-

pointment and suffering is my heart consigned! I would that I might drink myself into unconsciousness, but that seems reserved for those who can do it—it is not for me—I must bear the curse and mark of sobriety, slumber not, and keep my pale face against the pane, looking out into the darkness, straining my eyes for a glimpse of—nothing, *nothing!*

You need not expect me to put on paper the particular happening which makes this a black day in my calendar, —indeed it is not necessary, for I think you sense it from afar. But this is written: when a dream-child, brought into the world by the travail of one who loves his kind, is strangled

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

by the strong, yellow hands of Greed and Selfishness, it cuts deep into the soul and curtains the sky.

I am alone, and down, and it is dark.

Are you afraid of the dark? Does the wind appal you? When the sails rend like gossamer and the spars are as punk in the gale, do you tremble and crouch and pray?

I am looking for some one who is strong, some one whose courage feeds on disaster, whose lips keep their crimson when hope is burnt to a white ash and the leer of the world is flung at the soul in defeat.

I guess there *must be* a God, but, oh, I am weak and tired—your arms, *your arms!*

THE DAWN

8

—————:—————

It is morning and all is well. The shallows of the glistening river sing over their white stones, the flowers have opened to greet the day, and the goldfinch wings his undulant way, prodigally spilling his melody into every ear that has learned to be attent.

And this was the day I feared, the day from which I shrank as if it contained a noose suspended over a scaffold of rough pine!

I was early awake. As a gipsy girl rises and washes her face in the

brook and runs back to the tent to waken her lover with a kiss, so the rays of the voluptuous sun stole through the crevices of the Venetian blind at my chamber window and wooed me into consciousness by their caress. And then I remembered a letter written to you at midnight, the call to you which it contained, and—*what happened afterward.*

I am more than half persuaded that you already know what I am now going to write, and if so I want you to tell me, for the fact of such knowledge would be of the utmost importance in the establishment of certain phenomena whose proofs, up to the present time, have been most slender and rare.

After I had finished that letter to you (which I enclose herewith) I turned the electric switch which governs the light in the library, and leaned forward in my chair, resting my face on my palms and gazing thro' the darkness, at the last ember in the grate. It was all that was left of the glorious fire which had dealt so skilfully with the evening chill, snapping with sheer ardor for its task and actually needing the chimney's channel for the escape of its surplus zeal. And now the bit of charred and smoking maple, with its single waning point of light almost ready to succumb to the darkness, seemed to symbolize my heart and hope. That was why I looked at it and sensed a

sort of grim fellowship with the ember's despair.

Between the library and reception hall there is a wide opening fitted with sliding oaken doors and hung with plain, heavy portières of linen, in color dark green. While it bears no relation to the matter in question, I might say that the linen thread in these portières was spun from the flax and woven by the hands of my mother's mother and, in woof and dye, the fabric appears to be quite imperishable.

I had closed the doors and released the portières so that they hung full over them—for was I not to open my heart to you, and did not adequate expression require the sense and spur

of entire seclusion? When one tells to the only other one how one feels when the battle goes wrong and the flag is struck, can the place of the telling be too still or too far away from those who would not understand, those who have not been qualified by love to receive with gentleness the tidings of defeat?

I think the ember's fading glow lasted five minutes,—it might have been ten,—and then, when the darkness was absolute, I straightened in my chair and gave verbal, involuntary utterance *to the heart-cry which formed the conclusion of my letter to you*. And then—there was light in the room. It came not from the chandelier—I had not touched the

switch,—nor from the grate—the fire was out,—nor from the moonless night outside, but from the direction of the oaken doors, locked and draped to keep out everything that might seek ingress, even sound and light. A succession of strange thrills ran through my body. It was as if a million little batteries were trained upon my being, pelting me with grains of warm, golden sand, each bringing its quota of life and hope and power. The ecstasy of it was indescribable, and under its spell I held myself in leash until *the elements that create and conquer* seemed to possess me utterly, and then, with peculiar, exultant strength and a new and supernormal sense of the worth

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

of life and opportunity, I rose to my feet and turned raptly and reverently toward the apparent source of the light and there, silhouetted against the drapery over the oaken doors, bearing no candle, herself the radiance, her vestment of white contrasting strangely with the crimson of the smiling lips and the pink of the waiting arms, was her to whom my soul had cried at midnight in the hour of its supreme need!

Tell me, is this news to you?

And tell me also, this: In the crisis-hour, when God is gone and there is no star, or when a soul has been qualified by experience and suffering to receive some great new truth, may it not be that time and

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

space, darkness and light, substance and form, even *all things* are put at Love's disposal for the work of reinforcement and revelation?

I do not believe in miracles—cannot think that there has ever been any interruption in the orderly operations of Nature—but I regard as reasonable the possibility that there are phases and functions of natural law with which we are not yet familiar.

And of this I am sure—I saw no wraith; I dreamed no dream; I needed *you*, and you came, and with you courage for the dawn. And that is why I see the river flowing over its white stones, and know the flowers are greeting the day, and hear the goldfinch's song. ——— ———

UPON HER BROW

8

———:

Your last letter is heavy with self-depreciation. Surely you dipped your pen that time in the ink of a raven mood, and wrote things about yourself which I strenuously deny. You look well in humility, I admit, but a garment is a thing which is put on and off and changed for others, and now I purpose to drape you with warrantable and gentle pride, and find a bit of laurel and a blessing to put where laurel and blessings belong—upon your brow! Bend low and

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

listen and then go proudly, for you among women are worthy.

If I read history aright the light which does most dispel the world's darkness is that which shines when the man-nature and the woman-nature are in apposition. Abelard had his Heloise, Browning his Elizabeth, Wendell Phillips his Ann, and the Man of Nazareth faced his daily task armored with the love and devotion of the women who ministered to him. If you put women out of the New Testament the Cross must go too, and there will be left only a prophet with a halting tongue, a teacher who dared not to die dutifully for his truth. But when a man's feet are laved with a woman's tears there

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

is not in all the world a path too steep for them, and the wormwood and gall of life are but as a draught from a cool, eternal spring.

I am not great, oh, woman of my heart, and probably my little span will pass undistinguished by any achievement which the world will list as notable, but what I am I am by the grace of you, my God incarnate, my mentor, star and spur, and lure to all that is best in life, now and after.

You know well the work which I have chosen for myself—chosen because I deemed it important and consonant with my nature—work in which I invest myself with the abandon of a gamester to whom the game

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

is all; well, this work I do as in the shade of your living presence.

If, with the rising of each day's sun, the spirit of the hunt is begotten within me, and I leap at my task as leaps the hound at the throat of the stag, it is because, for your sake, I count the quarry good and worth while.

You have believed in me and in what I am trying to do; when the world laughed at my dreams you smote its face with the fierceness of a woman who shields her own; in those creative hours when the Voices called and I dared not to disobey—when that which was not *became*—you were near, fusing your breath and prayer with mine; and when I have

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

staggered under the weight of things, and reached out in the darkness, always, *always* you have put yourself under my hand to stay and steady me. And in that later day of victory, when I and what I do are justified to the world, and I lie prone with weariness, as victors always lie at the battle's end, if you, *you*, will but kneel beside me and smile into my eyes—ah, that, indeed, will be to me the hour supreme!

This—this grateful avowal of what you are to me—is what I meant by the laurel and the blessing.

THE PROBLEM

8

—————: —————:

If our path should ever straighten and widen so we could walk it side by side, in the sunlight, seeing ahead, and with the permission afforded by a certificate of conventional marriage, what then? Would it be as well with us then as now?

Men and women were joined together and faced the issues of their fused lives long before the fickle cement of state or ecclesiastical ceremony was invented, and a home is something more than a house with a fire, a cat, a cot, a set of dishes and

two or more human beings moving about among the furnishings.

Once in a while, in order that I may be informed in the matter of marital advantage—or disadvantage—I climb as high as I can in the ether of disinterestedness and train my glass on the domesticity below. And this I see: many houses and few homes; many men and women living together and few real husbands and wives; crowds of accidental offspring, but only now and then a child who is the result of a spiritual conspiracy between its father and mother, whose being was deliberately planned in the starchamber of intelligence and love—love so sure of its own worth and divinity that it longs for perpetuation

in the ampler life of another and later soul. Soft carpets, delicate food and art in frames of gold have, in themselves, no joy or substance. Matrimony lacking sustained mental and affectional unity is a miserable estate. The function of man is the inspiration of woman; the function of woman is the inspiration of man. Wage-earning and housekeeping, children and charities are but incidents. The statesmanship of the heart involves an irrevocable statute of reciprocity—mutual inspiration. There is no level so dead as that which is reached in the descent of a man and woman who, wittingly or unwittingly—it makes no difference—have lost the power of communion.

and are daily stung by the memory of a brittle and impotent vow. Whoso loves is blest; whoso *promises* to love is a speculator in the soul's futures of which he knows nothing. My love is fair today, but will she be fair tomorrow? It will depend on her tomorrow quality—and *mine*. And then—oh, paradox of pain and heartbreak!—though she be as fair as Christ she may not be fair to *me*.

No man can love a woman, in the sex sense, merely because she is good. He can only love *his* woman, and then, whether she be good or bad, he is bought and sold by her smile or sigh. This may not be as it ought to be, but it is as it is, and the gods sit complacently by without interfering

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

with the resultant mosaic of happiness and woe.

I am not afraid of Fate; I do not shy at responsibility; I want all of life that is coming to me, and covet for you every good, but I am wondering whether any further bliss or opportunity would be added to you and me in an odor of orange blossoms and a shower of rice. What we have now is so sweet and inspirational, so given to the bringing out of the best that is in us, so marked in its progress toward the ideal, that I am loth to trade it, if the opportunity should occur, for any change or chance that might shatter the bisque of achieved happiness. The necessity for decision does not seem to be immanent,

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

but if it were, what would we do?
For my part I confess I do not know.
But this we can do without fear of
error—fight for every possible hour
like *the last*. Oh, the riches of it! I
count them over and over as a miser
counts his ingots, and the further
greed of me passeth understanding.

THE ACCIDENT

8

————— —————:

I have your letter saying that he is dead. The suddenness of the thing is, to a degree, shocking, but that is the way the wheel sometimes turns, and it may select one of us as the next victim. Who knows?

I believe you capable of the appropriate sort of grief.

You have hoed this row of yours to the end and hoed it well.

I bear him no ill-will, and never did. He is a young soul and, in time, will doubtless catch up with Justice and Gentleness and Opportunity.

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

He simply did not understand you—*could* not—and so was only able to hail you awkwardly across the gulf which lay between.

If there is aught I can do in this hour, command me. I fear there is nothing. But there may be other hours. If so, we will try to make them wholesome and fine. To think of a program just now would be untimely. I have only this word: when at the final hour, as you sit where you are expected to in the shaded room, be glad, with me, that the mean and unworthy has not passed between us. We have only walked the path that was plainly marked for us. I believe that for us both it has been an upward one, and that no injustice has

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

been done to the one who sleeps. Conceptions of fidelity differ; the choices of youth do not always stand; and true marriage is not a thing of time, place or ceremony, and may exist without the physical seal or sacrament.

This will of necessity be for you a time of retrospection, and I remind you of these things as a help to serenity—that you may not be unduly disturbed by the present circumstances, sad and trying as they may be, nor led into any repudiation of thoughts and feelings which were carefully weighed before they were entertained.

THE PROPOSITION

8

———:

Since Fate set fire to our thongs and our free feet are winged to carry us whither we will, I have been gathering my man-and-woman notions together, and desire now to spread them before you that you may know fully, think deeply, and decide wisely your part of the immanent question—what we are to do with our future.

A courtship on a haircloth sofa, with an emotional climax and two tickets for Niagara, is not in the picture. We are neither fledglings nor

fools. Whatever our years, we are not under thirty.

Experience has made us competent to weigh and choose and act and stay by. The best of life is still ahead—*it always is*. But we must make no mistake. The premature or ill-advised fusion of heart interests is always a mistake—the sorriest of earth—and our years and natures entitle us now, I think, to a pleasant sunlit sea, whether we sail together or otherwise.

My own mind is clear. The world of women has simplified itself—only you remain. You are my kind of a queen—I have known it long—and your scepter is the one under which I choose to bow, but *your* mind, too,

must be clear,—you must not weave of your tresses a coronet for me unless you are very certain that I am, and am likely to continue, your kind of a king.

Be reminded then that I am a peculiar man with many associates and few friends. My theories of life isolate me from the mass, and society, in the popular sense, I am not able even to discern. I am often lonely and sometimes would starve were it not for the nourishment which is stored up within myself—my own fat, as it were, tides me over. I am called impractical, a dreamer of dreams, an iconoclast, an idler. Because I cultivate poise and do not fume and sweat, some people who know me merely by

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

sight even say that I am lazy, though it is my custom to sleep at twelve, waken at six and toil the rest of the time, with numerous lapses, however, and a keen scent for any kind of a frolic which makes for *re*-creation.

I have proved most proverbs false and can live by them only after I have turned them up-side-down. I hate greed, idleness, pull, bluster, cruelty, intolerance, and a religion that can be used for trade purposes; and I love, well—the things that are summed up in you. A list is unnecessary—look in the glass.

I have heard that women are best pleased with burly men who tyrannize over them and knock them about, but I hope this is n't true in your case—I

know it is n't—for that rôle does n't fit me, I should be mis-cast. Always would I guard and shelter you and study to provide the environment which comports with your nature, the setting which does most facilitate the expression of your rays and values.

Your hands are beautiful, skilful, competent, and I have respected you because, unlike women who loll and dress and parade, you have chosen to be busy, to have a task, to achieve excellence along many lines of manual and artistic accomplishment, interpreting yourself by what you wrought with persistence and pains-taking care.

But now I have a different plan for you—I hope you may think it a better

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

one. I do not want you for house-keeping purposes nor even as an administrative domestic convenience. You are to be neither cook, laundress nor maid, and whatever is necessary in the way of embroidery or dress-making can be "let out." Many a good and worthy woman who is not my kind of a queen is looking for just such work as this and really has the right to be employed.

My program for you is this: You have proved your capacity for many forms of work which you *had* to do; now, you are to *elect* your occupations, you are to give free rein to your choices, and do the things you *love* to do. Your tastes and whims are to be considered and the oppor-

tunities you have longed for and been denied, are to come your way in plenteous measure; you are to have abundant time in which to care for and perpetuate your body—it is a wonderful body, the only one you will have for quite a long while, and it is entirely worthy of the finest possible attention. It is your house, the one you live in, the one by which you explain yourself to the world. If house-keeping must be done, you may do it there. I think one's main debt to the universe is to keep young and vibrate health and goodwill to the last. To this end you are to have all the conveniences.

Then, in my busy hours, sometimes, I want you in my office, not as an

amanuensis, but as a companion and counselor. In the world of business there has not as yet been proper appreciation of the intuitive faculty of woman—would you mind functioning on this plane a little, for my sake—mind being occasionally a real, live partner in the dollar-game which simply *must* be played, no matter how much we may prefer to play at golf or literature or travel?

And then at night I could wish to find you waiting for me fresh and ready for the evening together,—a fine and happy evening wherever we may elect to spend it.

This, with country roads and fields and books, a glimpse of the sea and what is beyond, a share of our best

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

for those who lack, and the chivalry of a durable romance, is what I have in mind.

Can you brook this plan and the man who made it? Now be very, very sure. Think it over, count a hundred, and then—let me know!

WHY

8

—————:

I mailed you a letter this morning and now I am writing again! Can you stand another so soon? Really this one is quite different from any that has gone before, and if you do not like it you may, well—send it back unopened.

While what I have hitherto written to you is out of my heart and hope, I have endeavored to avoid the lover's common phrase, and the titles and endearments tossed easily from careless lips. You are not my darling, my only one, a human property to be ad-

dressed in the terms of ownership. You are a woman, *yourself*, with your own life to live, your own course to run, your own goal to attain. My title to you is not clear. In the Hall of Records there is no writing which proclaims that you are mine. I cannot plat you like a town, nor environ you with walls of steel, nor wear you as a jewel upon my hand. And yet, possibly, by the right of desire and consonance, and with the free assent of your own nature, you *are* my estate, my treasure, my pearl of price, —not to do with as I will, in the way of self and restriction, but to help you to fulfil your own life and destiny, to find my joy in your flight, though I but stand on the ground and look

whither you have ascended. If fear is the thing that perfect love casts out, then from my heart is forever evicted the fear that I can lose you through the fulfilment of the high prophecies of your own being.

We are wont to speak of two kinds of love, human and divine, but love is of a single essence—all love is divine, and the passion which spends not itself on the well-being of its object, is not love at all, but a craven soul-metal whose baseness is revealed by the test of fire to which all things are subjected.

Having this concept of the nature of love, its mission and majesty, I hesitate to attempt the expression of what my heart holds for you. But,

I love you, and before you make answer to my letter of this morning, let me tell you *a little* of the *why*.

I love the heart of you, so tender;
the mind of you, so broad and strong;
the soul of you—the whitest gem in
any fleshly setting:

I love your truth which flows down
to me through your speech and bearing,
like a beneficent brook whose
source is high among God's rocks and
pines:

I love you for the wit and banter
which ring so cheerily upon the shield
of my philosophy:

I love your thought for the poor—
our brothers of the thatch and brick,
with but half a chance, fore-doomed

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

to quiver under the lash and charity of the rich and the strong:

I love your love of animals,—the lesser folk who are in process and who will arrive, yet who, meanwhile, must take their grain or bone from human hands and speak their thankfulness from quiet eyes and by patient faithfulness:

I love your hidden years, the years about which I do not know, but whose fruit I see in what you are:

I love your coming years, putting in my hands the gold of opportunity, the chance to be to you what a man should be to a woman:

I love the prospect with you of what is called *old age*, the time when we shall enter upon our finer youth,

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

and in the later hope and strength of it, when our now-bodies are in their earth again, seek out each other in the distant spheres:

I love you for the way you look into my eyes, sailing your very self into the harbor of my longing:

I love in you the promise of other lives which shall be the expansion and further expression of your own:

I love your hunger, that I may get you bread; your thirst, that I may search out a spring; your weariness, that I may cut boughs for your reclining:

I love your body, for do *you* not dwell in it? And is it not the medium by which you interpret yourself to me, and touch me into the

THE THINGS HE WROTE TO HER

human heaven whose streets are long and fair?

I love your lips; the lashes of your eyes; the hands that press my temples; the hair that forms my canopy at the heated noon; the breast that pillows me when I, by toil, have earned the right to rest within your arms; and I love you for, oh, so many other things! The list is long and I fain would finish it not now, but in the sweet after-days when we are together—*together!*

I told you in the other letter to take your time in thinking everything over, but please don't take too long—*I am waiting.*

THE END



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